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ABSTRACT

The paper illustrates the main lines of documentation activity at the Italian Radio and Television Agency, with specific reference to the automated and intergrated system based on the use of key-words, recently adopted for audio, visual and written material in the journalistic area. It also provides an extensive report on studies on the professional characteristics required of documentalists, the possibility of aptitude tests in their selection and data on the professional training courses currently given. (Author)

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EXPERIENCE IN THE FIELD OF RADIO AND TELEVISION DOCUMENTATION

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The paper illustrates the main lines of documentation activity at the RAI, with specific reference to the automated and integrated system based on the use of key-words, recently adopted for audio, visual and written material in the journalistic area. It also provides an extensive report on studies on the professional characteristics required of documentalists, the possibility of aptitude tests in their selection and data on the professional training courses currently given.

RAI — the Italian Radio and Television Agency — has in recent years tackled the problems of documentation with the utmost decision, conscious of their importance for the purposes of production and research on a vast cultural and social scale.

To this end, the improvements gradually made in RAI's filing systems have concerned not only the procedures of information classification, storage and retrieval, but also the institution of *a unified, coordinated system* of processing sound, visual and written documentation.

Interpreting the documentary function and all the connected technical and organizational requirements on a unitary basis, the conceptual centralization of all documentation activities has thus been effected, with considerable advantages at both management and retrieval level. This, while leaving operational autonomy in each sector unaltered, ensures homogeneity in the criteria of classification, presentation and retrieval of documents or varying origin.

The intergrated automatic documentation system today in force is therefore covered by a common system of rules, the essence of which is represented by the use of key-words that are perfectly compatible with the needs of the different archives. While appropriate developments of the system are forecast, for the time being it is applied for material of predominantly journalistic interest, including records and magnetic tapes (the « Registroteca » of the News Service), films (the

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« Cineteca » of the TV News Service), and daily newspapers and periodicals (the « Emeroteca »» of the Press Documentation Service).

In each of these sectors, groups of documentalists are used who have received training in special professional courses.

Although the material supports from which information is obtained — and which for sound and visual documentation imply the uses of gramophones, tape recorders and moviolas — are different, the working criteria, i.e. the criteria of selection and classification of the various documents, are basically the same. In fact they consist in listening to or viewing the complete services broadcast in order to obtain therefrom in a first phase an accurate analytic, written description and, subsequently, a meaningful synthesis of the various information elements, based on key-words and on a number of supplementary content indications, which together with technical data, help to broaden knowledge of the document. In the case of written documentation, naturally there is direct compilation of the summary.

Certain other points are common to all three sectors: the machine processing of the data, all registered on punched tape; the electronic processing of the information, which *inter alia* gives rise to the printing of separate alphabetic key-word permutation catalogues (called Kwic Indexes); and control to keep up the efficiency of the integrated documentation system.

These explanatory notes regarding the documentation activity performed by RAI can make it easier to understand the more specific topics that interest the Conference. These refer to the selection and professional training of documentalists, and in a sincere spirit of collaboration, well aware of the utility that can emerge from an exchange of information on this subject, hitherto with such a dearth of traditions, an attempt will be made to give every possible information based on the experience directly acquired.

It must be pointed out that the selection of documentalists, regarded as an essential stage conditioning the ensuing training process, has been accorded considerable importance by RAI, with fairly broad theoretical indications on the professional background of those to be assigned duties and with appropriate selection tests to provide a concrete idea of the candidates' real abilities.

On the first point, the overall requisites are formulated as follows:

1. *Sex*

Other general characteristics being equal, females are preferred.

2. *Age*

Not important for selection purposes, since persons of various ages can possess the necessary aptitudes.

3. *Educational level*

University entrance standard (school leaving certificate). A knowledge of foreign languages (English and French in particular) is preferred.

4. *Non-Scholastic preparation*

Broad-based, active interest and constant curiosity in events and aspects of daily life in the various fields (politics, economics, sociology, arts, sciences, entertainments, sport, fashion, various events). The resultant good standard of information appears closely related to a regular utilization of the mass media and, particularly, the systematic reading of newspapers and periodicals.

5. *Personal Characteristic*

The duties concern a subject based on several fields. It is therefore necessary to have considerable mental agility and the ability to concentrated one's attention tenaciously, even for long periods, on the information material in questoin, to be able to grade and classify it appropriately and homogeneously, according to instructions. Consequently it is necessary to have considerable responsibility for one's own work, since the characteristics of a documentalist's work make complete control by a superior impossible, unless the latter redoes all the work.

In this framework, the following mental aptitudes are essential:

— Coherency and rigour in reasoning (a logical mind).
— A good memory and, for work in the Film Library, also a good visual memory.
— A high standard of objectivity and balanced judgment.
— Ability to assimilate correctly both general and particular regulations, even complex ones.
— A flair for analysis and the capacity to summarize, concretely expressed, in the ability swiftly to pinpoint, extract and faithfully coordinate in a few terms, using special keywords, essential information items in visual, sound or written documentation.
— A thorough mastery of the vocabulary, with particular knowledge of synonyms.

Apart from anything else, it is obvious that one who « participates » is most suitable for the job of documentalist, i.e. one capable of expressing a direct, continous interest in his work, which is essentially sedentary in type and calls for the following qualities: patience, orderliness, method, precision and conscientiousness.

The reason for the selection tests mentioned — which, however, for particular reasons, have not yet had any practical experiment-

ation — stems from the need to examine the basic aptitudes of aspiring documentalists at an early stage, in order to secure admission of the most likely candidates to the training course.

This procedure was in fact intended to discover, by and large, the suitability of the candidates especially regarding: standard of knowledge, mastery of vocabulary, memory and attention. In practice, *five short functional tests* have been worked out. They are all written tests, to be answered in a reasonable period of time, with the proviso that some of them might act as eliminators for subsequent tests. They are briefly described below.

Test 1 - Indicate the exact definition of 30 words of more or less common usage, and therefore applicable to the system of documentation adopted, choosing from a list of 5 definitions, of which one is right and four wrong.

Test 2 - In a list of 20 words, find 20 opposites, choosing from a series of 7 terms, only one which will fit.

Test 3 - Answer 40 questions on basic items of knowledge and various topical subjects (domestic and foreign politics, economic, industry, tourism, sport, literature, films, theatre, etc.).

Tests 4, 6 - News items — without heading and sub-heading — are clipped from a daily newspaper and photocopied. These are about international politics, domestic politics, crime, social events, sport and entertainment. 3 of them are selected by draw, and candidates are invited to pick out the focal points of each item, by choosing the *8 most significant words* from the text and entering them on a special sheet, enabling the contents to be reconstructed in summary but essential form. This technique is that adopted in practice by documentalists in summarizing various documents.

Test 5 - This test concerns the specific requirement of the Film Library, but at the same time can be applied to the other sectors of work. From a series of *30 slides*, it is required to recognize the people, landmarks and objects portrayed.

For the sake of simplicity, not all the criteria proposed to appraise the results are specified here. Points are assigned for each test: 1 or 2 points for correct or acceptable answers, and even ½ point if foreign names, for example are spelt wrongly. If the examination is based on the principle of progressive elimination, there is a pass limit of at least 60% of the maximum points in each of the first three tests, and of the first four tests on average, while $^1/_3$ of the questions of the photographic test must be answered correctly.

At all events, a final *talk* is recommended, to round out the examiner's judgment as to the specific qualities asked of documentalists, both educationally and regarding personality. Naturally this talk would be decisive for purposes of final assessment.

It now remains to examine the principles followed in carrying out the courses of professional training for documentalists. Such courses have already been arranged three times with few formal variations, in the sense that, while the doctrinal and practical content has remained as it is, special instructions have been given from instance to instance according to the specific sector for which the personnel are intended. For example: types of films, use and functioning of moviolas, structure of TV reporting services, terminology of press journals, formation and editing of news for Newscasts, etc.

Otherwise, the subjects dealt with have always been related to the need for serious instruction in the general and particular norms of documentation in the overall context of methodological and linguistic aspects.

It would be superfluous to give all the connected details here. Suffice it, therefore — and also in view of the informative nature of these notes — to indicate by way of example some of the subjects that have been dealt with in the RAI courses, which are to a large extent run by internal teachers and which are generally completed in *6 weeks*, of which 4 are devoted to theoretical-practical training and 2 to exercises in:

— Documentation and information.
— Phases of documentation activity.
— Principles of classification and cataloguing.
— Key-word classifying.
— Language problems.
— Rules for analysis and summarizing.
— Relations between documentalists and users.
— Electronic data processing.

The last course, which was held in the summer of 1971 for an intake of 6 new documentalists (out of 20 persons available), comprised about 75 hours of lessons and 100 hours of practical work. The results achieved, in the commitment of the participants and their subsequent job output, were by and large certainly positive.

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